



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
**MANAGER'S REPORT**

DATE ISSUED: September 8, 2004

REPORT NO. 04-192

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council  
Docket of September 13, 2004

SUBJECT: SAN DIEGO RIVER PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

SUMMARY

Issue(s) – Should Council accept City Manager's Report No. 04-192

Manager's Recommendation(s) – Accept City Manager's Report No. 04-192

Other Recommendation(s) – None

Fiscal Impact – None with this action

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2001, Mayor Dick Murphy, with support of Council member Frye, CD 6 and Council member Madaffer, CD 7, and Council member Wear, CD2, whose districts include the river, invited elected officials from the local jurisdictions (County and City of Santee), the State and Federal governments and the San Diego River Park Foundation, to be members of a San Diego River Alliance.

That same year, a group of citizens concerned about the condition of the river and its surrounding environs, formed the San Diego River Park Foundation and the San Diego River Coalition. The Foundation is a 501-C-3 non-profit and has a mission to support and empower community groups working to restore and enhance the river and to foster stewardship of this important community and regional asset in perpetuity. The Coalition is a group of citizens representing surrounding community and special interest groups

with a mission to preserve and enhance the San Diego River watershed, and its natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

The Alliance in concert with the San Diego River Park Foundation and the San Diego River Coalition, are working towards creating a San Diego River Park that addresses recreational opportunities, cultural resource protection, habitat conservation and restoration, and improvement of the water quality of the River from its headwaters to the ocean.

Recognizing the importance of the San Diego River as a resource, in 2002, with the assistance of Assemblymember Christine Kehoe and State Senator Dede Alpert, Assembly Bill 2156 passed, establishing the San Diego River Conservancy, whose boundaries are the full length of the river and a half mile on either side. Concurrently, the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan was developed by students in Studio 606, a landscape architecture graduate program in the Department of Landscape Architecture, at California State Polytechnic University (CALPOLY) Pomona. This plan was prepared for the San Diego River Park Foundation, sponsored by the California Coastal Conservancy and the Select Committee on Park & River Restoration, chaired by Assemblymember Christine Kehoe. Utilizing the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan as a foundation, the Alliance recommended that local jurisdictions pursue individual River Park planning efforts.

The City of San Diego advertised a Request for Qualifications for a consultant to develop the San Diego River Park Master Plan for the San Diego River that would encompass the entire City's jurisdiction up to ½ mile on each side of the River. Statements of Qualifications were received from fifteen (15) consultant teams. Eight teams were interviewed. CIVITAS, Inc. consultant team was selected and an agreement was approved by San Diego City Council in August of 2003.

The Draft Master Plan is being developed in three (3) phases.

1. Analysis and Findings
2. Options
3. Draft Final Master Plan

Each phase of the project has involved public input. As part of the Master Planning effort the consultant conducted 3 public workshops, attended monthly Coalition meetings and presentations were made to a number of interested community advisory and other groups, including:

1. Mission Trails Regional Park Citizens Advisory Committee
2. Wetlands Advisory Committee
3. Mission Trails Regional Park Task Force
4. Tierrasanta Community Council
5. C3
6. Mission Bay Park Committee
7. North Bay PAC Redevelopment District

8. Ocean Beach Planning Board
9. Mission Valley Unified Planning Organization
10. Linda Vista Planning Group
11. Navajo Community Planners
12. Old Town Community Planning Committee
13. Park and Recreation Board Design Review Committee
14. Park and Recreation Board
15. San Diego River Conservancy

On June 18, 2004 the Draft Master Plan was provided to each of the above listed committees for their review and input. The Plan has received a wide range of support.

The plan was presented to the Planning Commission on August 19, 2004, as an information item. Commissioners supported the Master Planning efforts and emphasized:

- education is an important element in the success of the Park. There should be a dialogue with the School District on the river becoming an “educational laboratory”;
- the plan needs to incorporate additional existing conditions information;
- the significant opportunity for the Qualcomm site, in its relationship to the river, to become a major regional park facility;
- during an economic analysis, emphasize the quality of life benefits of a major regional park facility and not just the monetary benefits of development.

## DISCUSSION

During the Concept Plan phase of the Master Plan, the CALPOLY, Pomona, Studio 606 design team, with input from the surrounding communities, developed 4 major goals. These goals along with the overall Plan were endorsed by the San Diego River Park Alliance. The four major goals are as follows:

1. To preserve and celebrate the San Diego River’s historic resources.
  - a. Develop partnerships with existing historical resources.
  - b. Enhance preservation of historic and cultural resources.
  - c. Facilitate education about the river’s rich history.
2. To support the natural stream processes of the San Diego River.
  - a. Support sediment transport processes and manage erosion.
  - b. Work toward decreasing flooding and increasing groundwater volumes.
  - c. Improve water quality.
  - d. Educate the public about how their actions impact the river environment.
3. To preserve and enhance native riparian and upland habitat throughout the San Diego River Park.

- a. Enhance native habitat.
  - b. Maintain and improve habitat connectivity throughout the Park.
  - c. Integrate recreation in such a way as to minimize impacts to sensitive species.
  - d. Facilitate education about the river environment.
4. To provide access to recreation activities throughout the San Diego River Park.
- a. Connect existing recreational facilities
  - b. Provide a continuous trail along the length of the San Diego River.
  - c. Provide additional recreational opportunities and improve trail connectivity from the region into the river park.
  - d. Maintain and improve the natural aesthetics of the river corridor.
  - e. Enhance educational opportunities along the river.

Utilizing the accepted Conceptual Plan as a baseline, the CIVITAS consultant team developed seven principles. These principles are the guiding ideas that express the essential elements of the San Diego River Park Master Plan, describing the intent and role of the Park in the City and region.

**Principles:**

***1. Create a synergy of people, water and wildlife.***

The key to success of the San Diego River Park is to find a balance that best serves the valley and its many inhabitants, including people, animals and plants. Each of these interests has a place within the multi-faceted system that is the river valley, and the San Diego River Park must accommodate and welcome all of them.

***2. Clean-up and restore hydrologic function to the river.***

While the river cannot return to a truly natural flow state, a properly managed condition can restore a large degree of the river's hydrologic function. The San Diego River Park effort will recognize the existing hydrologic condition as the baseline. Management should focus on controlling the pattern of flow, improving water quality, improving sediment transport and increasing groundwater recharge.

***3. Reclaim the valley as a Common.***

By aggregating as much of the remaining open land within the valley, reclaiming a distinct and identifiable river corridor, and restoring the river's riparian integrity, the sense of the valley as a place for people and for wildlife can be re-established.

**4. *Unify fragmented lands.***

Significant open space brackets the river, in Mission Bay Park to the west and Mission Trails Regional Park to the east. The lands between these two points are a patchwork of developed and undeveloped areas. These lands are critical to preserving and expanding the continuity of natural landscape. Knitting the river corridor together through landscape and use expands the sense of the river valley as a whole.

**5. *Emphasize a continuum of experience.***

The experience of the landscape is diverse and changes throughout the valley. Continuity is essential to this meshing kaleidoscope of experience. Visual continuity coupled with physical continuity is an integral piece of the experiential continuum. The San Diego River Park should seek opportunities to enhance both kinds of continuity.

**6. *Reveal the valley history.***

The valley has long been central to the settlement of the San Diego region. Although much of the evidence of this history has been lost, a number of artifacts and sites remain. Increased public interest and knowledge benefits these sites by instilling a sense of responsibility for their preservation and care. Increased visitor traffic can also have its negative effects and careful evaluation of a site's ability to support visitor traffic is critical.

**7. *Reorient development toward the river.***

The river should be a 'front door', an amenity to celebrate. Existing development should seek ways to draw the river character into current uses. New development should face the river, taking design cues from the forms and materials lining the river, scaling and orienting new buildings to complement, not compete with, the river corridor.

In addition to the goals, the consultant team developed key recommendations. Where the principles define the essential goals and guiding ideas for the vision of the San Diego River Park, the recommendations describe the specific strategies for achieving the intent of the principles.

Five key recommendations were identified for the river as a complete system. Specific recommendations were identified for six "reaches" of the river.

**Key Recommendations:**

***Return the river to health.*** Improve the river pattern and water quality by separating stream flow from ponds and creating a wider riparian corridor with more meander. Remove exotic vegetation and plant native species. Create links to canyons and uplands. Remove exotic vegetation and plant native species.

***Remember the big picture.*** Connect the valley to adjacent open space including the beaches, Tecolote, Murray, Ruffin, Murphy and Alvarado Canyons and Lake Murray to create an ecostructure of a unified native landscape by transforming rights-of-way and creating open space easements.

***Build city wide connection.*** Establish a continuous trail system from ocean to mountain and canyon to canyon with frequent access to transit, canyons, and neighborhoods. Coordinate with San Diego Bicycle Master Plan and develop specific study to confirm route alignment.

***Assemble a beautiful infrastructure.*** Preserve a broad corridor for habitat and wildlife through acquisition of land, open space easements and partnering with managers of infrastructure to transform roads, bridges, trolley, parking lots, culverts, channels and utility easements to be part of a unified native landscape.

***Create a sequence of unique places and experiences.*** Establish a linked string of parks and open spaces through acquisition of land and partnerships with land owners in key locations. Collaborate with and support Mission Valley Community Plan to identify areas for land acquisition for miniparks, neighborhood parks, and community parks as well as for open space on valley walls. As redevelopment occurs, engage landowners in process to orient new development to the river, with the potential for an urban river plaza.

Over the last 12 months the consultant team has worked to develop a clear and concise set of goals and recommendations. At this point, while refining the master plan, a focus on examining options for implementation has begun.

Several options are available for incorporating the river park master plan into the City's policies and regulations. Unlike other City park master plans, the adoption and implementation of the master plan is complicated by the fact that most of the subject property is privately owned. The potential options identified to date, which can be combined, are to:

- 1) adopt the master plan to be part of the Progress Guide and General Plan
- 2) amend the affected community plans, park plans, and zoning code
- 3) apply an overlay zone.

The following is a preliminary evaluation of the options. Further analysis is needed to determine the proper course of action.

#### Progress Guide and General Plan Update

The master plan could be adopted as part of the Progress Guide and General Plan, just as the Bicycle Master Plan was recently adopted. The potential problem with this course is that there are some conflicts with the applicable community plans, park master plans, and

zoning. The fact that the river park master plan acknowledges that amendments to those plans are necessary to align these policy documents before some recommendations can be implemented may resolve these issues, particularly for long range projects for which there is time to amend the relevant community and park plans. In other cases where there is more detail in the master plan than in community or park plans, such as recommendations on the design or location of a pathway, this detail could be considered a further refinement of existing plan recommendations rather than a conflict. In spite of the potential conflicts, adopting the master plan as a whole to be part of the General Plan has benefits.

#### Community Plan Amendments

The various affected community plans, park plans, and zoning can be amended as needed. Adopting the document as a whole ensures that it does not lose its continuity or otherwise become diluted in only writing relevant sections into the various documents, and it ensures the immediate implementation of the bulk of the document. Affected community plans include Linda Vista, Mission Valley, Navajo, Tierrasanta, and East Elliott; affected park master plans include Mission Bay Park Master Plan and Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan. The Mission Valley Planned District zoning may also be affected.

#### Overlay Zone

An additional tool to implement the master plan is to enforce it with an overlay zone, just as the Mission Trails Design District surrounding Mission Trails Regional Park is enforced. In this case the master plan could be adopted as guidelines for the overlay zone. The overlay zone would require most projects to obtain a discretionary permit and would require that the projects conform to the river park master plan. The overlay zone would provide a stronger enforcement tool and could help resolve differences between the river park plan and the underlying land use plans, park plans, and zoning. The boundaries of the overlay zone would need to be determined.

As the project is further refined, staff will continue to investigate the options and determine the best mechanism for implementation of the Master Plan.

The primary purpose for this item is to provide the Council with an informational update on the status of the San Diego River Park Master Plan and to receive input and support for the overall plan direction. Staff is specifically requesting confirmation and/or input on the overall Master Plan goals.

ALTERNATIVE(S)

1. Accept City Manager's Report No. 04-192 with modifications.
2. Do not accept.

Respectfully submitted,

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Bruce Herring  
Deputy City Manager

Herring / Harkness

Note: The attachment is not available in electronic format. A copy is available for review in the Office of the City Clerk.

Attachment:           1.       San Diego River Park, City of San Diego Draft Master Plan